



## No drought yet, but it is very dry

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**By Dave Murray**

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West Michigan lawns typically don't turn brown until long after the Fourth of July fireworks have faded, but some unusual weather conditions have prompted a dryness that, in some areas, could have farmers and gardeners seeing red.

Since the start of June, the Grand Rapids area has seen 1.83 inches of rain – less than half the 4.27 inches that falls on average.

Experts say it is too early to start talking about a drought, but farmers would not mind seeing a little more rain – and soon. National Weather Service said the forecast calls for a possible thunderstorm early Sunday.

"It's kind of unusual because the areas north and south of us have had their rain," said meteorologist David Beachler of the National Weather Service. "It just hasn't fallen here."

Beachler said areas north of Big Rapids and along Int. 94 appear to have normal rainfall, while the rest of West Michigan has experienced only an occasional spotty thunderstorm or drizzle.

That means folks looking to keep their lawns lush need to keep sprinklers working overtime. The Grand Rapids Water Department said the weather has not been dry enough yet to merit restrictions on watering.

However, the dry stretch has folks who maintain and install underground sprinklers hopping. Dick Brill, owner of H2Oasis in Rockford, said business is up, especially after last year's soggy summer.

"When it's dry outside, the phone starts ringing. And when it's raining, it's not ringing," Brill said. "It almost goes day -to-day. It's been a pretty busy summer so far."

Farmers are not doing as well as last year but are not experiencing great problems yet, said Jim Breinling of the Michigan State University Extension office in Newaygo County.

"We talk about the good, bad and ugly – and there have been some spots that are ugly," he said. "I've had farmers tell me they've had to replant spots in some of their fields. But so far, it's been limited to spots, so they're OK."

The lack of rain hasn't had a significant impact on Lake Michigan, which is down about 3 inches from last year, according to the Army Corps of Engineers.

Watering the grass at Millennium Park isn't a problem. Park Manager Todd Sterner said he recycles water from the lakes.

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